

AN ADVENTURE IN OLD LOVES

MRS. CARISFORD had been widowed two years before she remembered Parker Deane. She was sitting in the sunny bow window of her boudoir making a mental list of the eligible men in her set and wondering which one would prove the most tractable successor to Dicky Carisford. In the net she rumbled her red-brown hair with pretty hands.

"They are all fools!" she cried pettishly, and at that very instant flashed the memory of her first love, Parker Deane, smiting her jaded heart to renewed action, while a bit of natural color struggled through her complexion. "I wonder," she murmured, and fell to dreaming of better days.

Her father's place at Seaford adjoined the Deane estate, and it was across a dividing hedge of roses that young Parker had kissed her not unwilling lips and awakened her dreaming heart. But her mother was ambitious and Mona loved money—they both needed it—and Dicky Carisford was a glittering millionaire prize and Mona had caught him. All that was fifteen years ago and she had never been to Seaford since the day she confessed the truth to Parker Deane.

Dicky had been a great care from the very beginning. There was always plenty of money to spend, but Dickey with his feet planted on the broad highway instead of the straight and narrow path, drank himself to death—and here was his widow. She sighed relievedly, and a little smile curled the corners of her mouth. Well—she would not be the first woman who had gone back and married her first love.

Poor Parker Deane! She had heard that he had never married, that he was a confirmed bachelor and a misogynist. She smiled at her reflection in the mirror. She could easily cure that.

The old homestead at Seaford had been rented furnished for many years, but it was untenanted now. She telegraphed her agent to have the house prepared for her coming.

The sea rolled to the foot of the steep cliffs and drew back its green skirts leaving bubbling ruffles of white, lace-like foam. The garden at Seaford bordered the cliff where rose-covered bowers sheltered marble benches. The long, low house was half-hidden by trees, and on the south side was a high hedge that divided the gardens from those of the Deane place next door.

Mona Carisford walked in the garden. She wore a cool white frock and carried a frilly white parasol balanced on her shoulder. Her face was fair, delicately tinted and one who was critical might have lamented the lack of soul. Her eyes and lashes were black and so were her delicately penciled brows. Her hair, a pale, flat gold was arranged in a simple girlish fashion. About her was the air of rare and fragile porcelain. Many men had loved her, and she had loved but one; now she was going to win him back.

Her little high-heeled white shoes

clicked up and down the graveled paths. Now and then she stood on tip-toe and tried to peep over the hedge into Parker Deane's garden.

For days she haunted the garden, gradually bringing back all the glamour of that brief summer madness. She flung wide the doors of memory and walked into the past. It is not given to many women to jilt love and marry for money and then be freed to go back and take that wounded love to her aching heart once more. So she told herself over and over again as she paced the garden paths. Now, that she was rich she could afford to marry for love, and where else could she seek love save in the garden where she had left him?

One morning she dressed herself in a pink linen frock—Parker had adored her in pink, she remembered; her maid, Leonie, chattered incessantly as she flew about the room. "Mestair Deane, next door, ess an—an—eccentric, Madame, so he deegs in his garden, he reads the birds and insects—La! La! I am so creepy with the thought of heem!"

"Nonsense!" reproved Mona sharply. "You have been listening to gossip, Leonie."

"The chauffeur, Pierre, ess not so bad," muttered Leonie sulkily, "and madame knows the country is dull."

Mrs. Carisford moved restlessly under the final touch of Leonie's deft fingers. If Parker Deane appeared eccentric to the servants and neighbors, she alone knew the cause. Disappointed in love, he had turned his thought to gentle pursuits of the country—the love of flowers—the study of birds and bees! Parker, who had been so filled with boyish enthusiasm for the deeds he meant to accomplish. Poor Parker, nursing his broken heart, cherishing her memory, and living in the dreamy past! It was a romance to fire the heart of any woman, and Mona Carisford almost admitted that it was more than she deserved of life.

She wondered what he would say when he saw her in the pink frock—the girl of his dreams coming to him across the lonely years? She looked at herself closely in the cheval glass and was startled anew at the youthful reflection of form and feature. Years can be cruel and kind—and there was magic in the crystal jars on her toilet table. Presently she looked again and nodded approval. Here indeed was Parker's old love.

She would go to him and awaken him from his dreams of birds and blossoms.

The garden path ended at a little rustic gate that opened into a thicket of gum trees belonging to the Deane estate. Mona Carisford went liting down the path to the rose garden. She paused to gather an armful of pink roses, and passed through the gate into the thicket of young trees.

Here the morning sunlight filtered through the leaves and made a pale green-golden light that was very en-

chanting. Sitting on a mossy hillock under a tree was a man, reading a book. Mona noted that while he was no longer very young, there was a certain expression of boyishness on his clearcut features. His hair, prematurely gray, added to his charm in her eyes. She saw with approval that his clothes of white flannel were immaculate and of a cut beyond criticism.

It was Parker Deane—changed a little, but so desirable now, after all. She tripped lightly toward him, stumbling gracefully and fell in a pink heap at his feet. In an instant he had picked her up. She swayed against him and his arm supported her firmly.

"Good Heaven, I hope you have not hurt yourself!" he exclaimed.

"I believe I have twisted my ankle—a little," she moaned.

She was a tiny creature, and he lifted her easily to his mossy seat.

"I will send to the house for a servant," she said, moving away.

"Oh, no! Pray do not bother; it feels better already; it will be all right in a moment. I am afraid I disturbed your reading." She looked up at him with her most bewitching smile.

He stood uncertainly for a moment, and then sat down nearby, his hands clasped around his knees. He looked at her with frank interest in his blue eyes.

"I am afraid you do not recognize me, Mr. Deane," she pouted prettily. "Upon my word, I do not," he said regretfully.

"I am your neighbor—" She nodded toward Seaford.

His eyebrows lifted slightly. "So many tenants have come and gone there—" His voice trailed vaguely away. He looked at her pleasantly.

"I have been away for fifteen years," she said slowly.

He was puzzled and a little startled. She saw the color mount to his forehead. So he was vulnerable after all.

"Fifteen years ago—the Seafords lived there," he remarked.

"Have I changed so much—Parker?" she reproached him.

Again he studied her. "You resemble a girl I used to know," he said grudgingly, "fifteen years ago."

"When the Seafords lived next door?" she whispered.

"How did you guess that?" he asked gravely.

"Because I—I remember, too! I was the girl!"

He smiled tolerantly and shook his handsome head.

"My girl had red hair and heaps of freckles, and little brown hands," he said, looking critically at Mrs. Carisford's jeweled white fingers.

Mona Carisford was silent. How detestable men were, blindly clinging to the memory of one's blemishes and adoring, while improved-hair and complexion were unappreciated.

"People change," she said at last.

"Yes."

"Sometimes for the better."

"Perhaps."

"Parker?"

Still that puzzled inquiry in his glance.

"You must remember me—Mona Seaford!"

He jumped up. "Mona Seaford?" he repeated incredulously. "It is not really you?"

She nodded. She was very near to tears. He should have recognized her long ago.

He reached down, took her hands and lifted her to her feet. He still held her hands tightly in his, and let the sunshine pour pitilessly upon her face.

"Where is your husband?" he asked grimly.

"Dead—he died two years ago."

"You are rich?"

"Very rich," she said, eagerly.

"Dicky left me everything."

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